

Minutes
King County Rural Forest Commission
January 8, 2003
Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Gordon Bradley, Steve Ketz, Ken Konigsmark, Bill Kombol, Fred McCarty, Doug McClelland, Dave Warren

Commissioners absent: Jean Bouffard, Rudy Edwards, Matt Mattson

Exofficio members: Mike Reed

Staff: Curt Crawford, Kathy Creahan, Kristi McClelland, Harry Reinert, Randy Sandin, Benj Wadsworth

Guests: Dennis Dart

Doug McClelland called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Dave Warren gave an update about the Vashon Forest Coop. The Coop has come to an agreement with the Vashon Parks District, the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust, and the equestrian community that they would like King County to take ownership of the 260 acres of WADNR land on the island, and the Coop will assist in managing it as a working forest. It is a big step forward that all of those groups could agree on the benefits of managing the land as working forest. The Coop has also identified 4.7 acres in the industrial area of Vashon that could be used as a log yard.

Kathy announced that she has taken a new job in the Office of Rural and Resource Programs. She will be the Coordinator of Rural and Resource Programs with her responsibilities broadening to include forestry and agriculture. ORRP will be hiring a new lead for the forestry program. In the interim, Benj, Kristi, Bill and Linda will be sharing the lead responsibilities. Kathy will work on trying to address interdepartmental issues that might be constraining forestry and agriculture.

Bill Kombol announced that Alder and Maple prices are at the highest they have been in a while – almost equal to Douglas Fir.

Ken Konigsmark announced that his assignment as a loaned executive from Boeing to the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway is supposed to end at the end of the first quarter. He is looking for a job and may have to step down as a member of the RFC depending on how things work out.

Steve Ketz commented that he assisted the KC forestry staff with a tour of the Snoqualmie Tree Farm for the KC basin stewards and the managers of the Water and Land Resources Division. He feels that there were some very enlightening comments and questions. There are some very strong feelings about forestry among this group, and it was good to initiate discussions among all concerned.

Minutes Approval

Motion 1-103 "To adopt the November 11, 2002 minutes as written." Moved, seconded and approved.

Staff Report

Benj Wadsworth informed the RFC that the 2004 Comprehensive Plan revision is underway (the Comp Plan is thoroughly revised every 4 years). It will not be a complete rewrite like it was in 2000, but it will be more thorough than a normal year. Karen Wolf is coordinating the effort and has begun scoping the issues that will be examined. She would like input from the RFC regarding any forest-related topics.

Staff has completed a landcover analysis using the 2000 remotely sensed images that were classified by a consultant. Comparison of the classified image with the airphotos suggests that there is a fair amount of error in the classification of various landcover types. With that in mind, the numbers show a 3.6% decrease in forest cover in the Rural Forest District between 1996 and 2000. Benj is not sure whether or not this is a statistically significant change regardless of the concern about qualitative error. Benj is in the process of doing a visual analysis of a small section of the airphoto to compare with the classified image in order to see if the numbers are similar.

The Council recently earmarked \$500,000 from the 2003 Conservation Futures fund for the Mitchell Hill North project. This is in addition to the \$100,000 of Conservation Futures funding that was awarded to the project last year. The County hopes to acquire development rights on 76 acres of working forest owned by two landowners. Staff is in the process of having one of the properties appraised.

The WADNR Forest Stewardship program is slated to be cut in the Governors budget. This is a concern for small forest landowners. Hopefully, the recommendation will change and the program will be preserved.

Benj distributed a summary of the RFC's stated priorities and accomplishments over the past two years. He would like to focus a future discussion on 2003 priorities.

Critical Areas Ordinance

Doug introduced Curt Crawford, supervising engineer in the Stormwater Services Section, and Harry Reinert, Special Projects Manager at DDES; both of whom are working on the Critical Areas Ordinance, particularly the 65/10 provision.

Harry stated that the CAO is being driven in part by the GMA mandate that counties and cities base their CAOs on "best available science." The County is trying to balance environmental protection and salmon recovery with forestry, agriculture, housing needs and economic growth. The County is trying to implement the recommendations of the Tri-County ESA proposal, particularly the storm water elements. One of the changes is to move from the current KC stream classification system to the system recommended by the Forest and Fish report that has been adopted by WADNR. The ordinance also proposes moving to the state wetland classification system. Randy Sandin clarified that the standards for evaluating wetlands will not change – they are established by the WA Department of Ecology. Discussion ensued about when the County has jurisdiction over forest practices. WADNR will continue to have jurisdiction over any forest practice that does not involve a conversion of the land to another use, unless the parcel was platted after 1960, in which case the County has jurisdiction. In these limited situations, the County would like to accommodate owners who intend to continue to practice forestry on the parcel. The Forestry Program has suggested that the County implement the same forest practice regulations as the state.

The CAO includes a provision requiring rural landowners to set-aside 65% of their property as native vegetation if/when they develop their land. To offset this burden, there are several incentives included in the proposal. If a landowner takes additional steps to set-aside specific habitats, such as old-growth forest, that are very valuable but not protected by the ordinance, they could get a two for one gain in the amount of land that they are allowed to clear – up to a maximum of 50% of a parcel. In other words, if they voluntarily protect an acre of old-growth, they could convert two acres above and beyond the 65% limit. Another provision is that if a parcel is already 90% cleared and a landowner is willing to set-aside 50% and put it into a forest management plan, then they could convert the other 50%. Also, if a property owner is willing to reforest a cleared area, then they could convert 50%. Harry clarified that forestry practices would be permitted in the 65% set-aside. Also, there are certain thresholds for when the 65% rule applies. On small parcels, 65% may not apply if it makes a parcel unbuildable. The 10% effective impervious surface would apply, but there are ways around it by using best management practices to address runoff concerns and manage runoff on the property.

Steve Ketz asked if there are any provisions in the CAO specific to the FPD or areas under mineral designation. There are no changes impacting the FPD. Mineral sites that are not regulated by state reclamation standards will be subject to additional County regulations. Doug McClelland stated that the haul routes used for landscape rock removal in the FPD need to be examined. They are currently not subject to the same scrutiny as roads used for timber hauling. Often roads are closed to hauling timber but not to hauling rock.

Bill Kombol commented that when developing in the Rural Area it is necessary to put a 100 ft diameter casing around a well. Often times it is not permitted to put it in a sensitive area. He feels that this wall should be allowed in a sensitive area, as it essentially serves to protect the area within it.

Ken Konigsmark commented that any regulations proposed for residential lots in the Rural Area should also affect residential lots in the FPD.

Harry suggested that commissioners should attend one of the public meetings. Information about the meetings and the CAO in general is available on the web at www.metrokc.gov/ddes/cao. Harry suggested that a topics paper about forestry would be helpful. He will work with Benj to develop one. Doug asked that Harry come back to the February meeting to update the RFC about the public comments that they receive and the direction that they are headed with the proposal.

Winery, golf course and APD clustering ordinances

Benj summarized the current direction with regard to wineries in the Rural Area and the APD, golf courses in the RA-10 zone, and clustering in the APD. At this point, the Executive is in favor of recommending the allowance of wineries as large as 3500 sq. ft in the APD and 12,000 sq. ft in the Rural Area, but not allowing golf courses in the RA-10 zone. The clustering issue has not been raised again in 2003 and may be dead.

Ken stated that he is concerned that allowing wineries in either the APD or the Rural Area will set a terrible precedent and open the door to other non-residential uses in the rural area. He feels that 10-acre residential lots are far more appropriate than either wineries or golf courses.

David Warren asked how either wineries or golf courses promote forestry, which is the RFC's charge.

Bill Kombol suggested that a winery relies on rural ambiance and thus might be fitting in the rural area. He suggested that wineries be allowed but that the owner be required to mitigate its impact by preserving forestland elsewhere. He also suggested that a golf course would be a better neighbor to a working forest than a residential landowner.

Fred McCarty suggested that a golf course might provide a good transition to working forests, but he is concerned that golf courses will encourage the wrong cultural mix of people in the rural area.

Steve Ketz commented that if the RFC wants to prohibit all non-residential uses in the rural area, then it should simply make that recommendation, though he feels that it may not be defensible. He also commented that permanent preservation of forestland will always involve compromises, and he feels that requiring mitigation in the form of forestland preservation is a good end result.

Benj commented that the existing regulations prohibit non-residential uses – the County is not proposing new regulations.

Doug summarized the discussion by suggesting that the RFC oppose wineries and golf courses because they would open the door to other industries. If wineries or golf courses are allowed, then they need to be mitigated through the acquisition of forestland. Vashon Island is a unique ecosystem and more threatened by water withdrawals. For that reason, it should be given special consideration regarding these ordinances.

Motion 2-103: To submit a letter reflecting Doug's summary. Moved, seconded and approved.

Comp Plan

Ken commented that the issue of 80-acre zoning in the FPD needs to be resolved, as do the issues of non-residential uses in the Rural Area and residential uses in the FPD. He also feels that the County should re-examine the idea that removing land from the FPD should require adding land to the FPD elsewhere.

Bill Kombol suggested the need to revisit the moratorium issue - that when you harvest one acre, a development moratorium should not be placed on the entire parcel. He also wonders if there are FPD lands that should be moved into an Rural Forest Focus Area?

Steve Ketz stated that the issue of 80-acre zoning in the FPD is extremely volatile, and he feels that it would not be a constructive discussion topic for the Comp Plan review.

Benj will mention the other suggestions to Karen.

Next meeting

Wednesday, February 12, 10:00 – 12:00, Preston Community Center.